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**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
Washington, DC 20515-4610

**Statement by U.S. Rep. Frank R. Wolf**  
**Tibet - A First-Hand Look**  
**August 9 - 13, 1997**

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This report provides a brief account of the findings of Congressman Frank R. Wolf during his visit to Tibet in August 1997. Congressman Wolf is the only sitting Member of the U. S. House of Representatives to visit Tibet since the Chinese occupation began in 1959. His first person discussions with individual Tibetans provide a sobering look at life there under a brutal People's Republic of China (PRC) regime and paints a far different picture than the one served up by the Chinese government in Beijing.

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## **Introduction:**

I recently returned from a journey to Tibet where I visited during the period August 9 - 13, 1997. Accompanied by a member of my staff and by another Western man fluent in Tibetan and steeped in its culture, history and religion, we traveled with U.S. passports and on tourist visas issued by the government of China. At no time was I asked nor did I make known that I was a Member of Congress. Had I done so, I am sure that my visit would not have been approved just as other Members of Congress requesting permission to visit Tibet have been turned down.

No sitting Member of the U.S. House of Representatives has visited Tibet since China began in 1959 its relentless (and largely successful) effort to squeeze the life and very soul out of this country, its culture and its people. Only three U.S. Senators have visited Tibet in the last several decades and they were closely shepherded by the Chinese. Aside from U. S. ambassadors in Beijing and Assistant Secretary of State John Shattuck, I am unaware of visits by senior officials from any presidential administration during these years.

To be sure, an approved delegation visit to Tibet would not likely be all that revealing since frank conversations with individuals could not take place. I cannot think of another place in the world where a tighter lid is kept on open discussion. Government

agents, spies and video cameras guard against personal outside contact. Offenders, even suspected offenders, are dealt with quickly and brutally.

### **Human Rights Protection:**

My interest in Tibet and the driving force behind my visit centers on work to help in stopping religious persecution and protecting basic human rights. In 1996, the House passed three measures concerning these issues, one specifically relating to Tibet. This year I introduced H. R. 1685, the Freedom From Religious Persecution Act of 1997, which contains specific provisions relating to Tibetan Buddhism. It has over 100 cosponsors. These are areas about which I and others care very deeply.

In Tibet humane progress is not even inching along and repressed people live under unspeakably brutal conditions in the dim shadows of international awareness. I want the world to know what is going on in Tibet. When people know, they will demand that China change its policy of boot-heel subjugation and end what one monk I met termed "**cultural genocide.**"

I found that the PRC has a near-perfect record of vicious, immediate and unrelenting reprisal against the merest whisper of Tibetan dissent. I met with monks, men and women on the street and others **who risked their personal safety and well-being to steal a few moments alone with me to tell how bad conditions are in Tibet and to petition help and support from the West.**

### **Tibet on the Map:**

Tibet is known as the roof of the world and, indeed it is. The Tibetan plain rises above 12,000 feet. At night, with skies so clear, more stars beam down on the observer than one can imagine. Beneath this roof is the former home of the Dalai Lama, the religious leader who ruled the country from the impressive Potala Palace in the capital of Lhasa. In 1959, when China commenced a relentless program to erase Tibet from the pages of history, the Dalai Lama left his homeland for India where he and countless other Tibetans who followed remain in exile today.

Tibet is about the geographic size of western Europe with a Tibetan population of around six million. It has been estimated that in the past two decades nearly one million Tibetans have been killed, starved or tortured. At the same time the PRC has undertaken *a program of mass infusion of Chinese people who probably now outnumber Tibetans in their own country.* There are no valid census data, but some estimate that in the capital of

Lhasa there are about 160,000 Chinese and only about 100,000 Tibetans. The difference in numbers may be less startling in remote areas but the inescapable conclusion is that China is swallowing Tibet. Stores, hotels, bazaars, businesses and tradesmen are largely Chinese. Storefront signs bear large Chinese writing beneath much smaller Tibetan inscriptions. Driving out from Lhasa, one encounters as many Chinese villagers, shepherds, farmers, construction workers and travelers as Tibetan. In short, Tibet is disappearing.

Tibet lies along the border of Bhutan, Nepal, India and Pakistan and is rich in resources including agriculture, timber and minerals. Its importance to China is both strategic and economic. China seems certain to maintain its death grip on this land and strives to do so behind sealed doors. There is no independent press in Tibet. I did not see a single newspaper or magazine available to the people. Television is extremely limited and tightly controlled by the PRC. Outside press is not welcome and not allowed. Only Voice of America, to which virtually all Tibetans listen, and Radio Free Asia, which is relatively new, beam information into Tibet. Nothing goes the other way except slips of information carried out by occasional tourists and visitors.

### **Tibet Up Close:**

What do the Tibetan people say? Before my trip I was told that individuals would seek me out as an obvious Western visitor to hear their story. I was also told this was very dangerous to them; that informers were everywhere and being caught talking to a westerner was a guaranteed ticket to prison and more. Frankly, I was skeptical that anyone would approach us. I was wrong. Someone took advantage of almost every opportunity for a guarded word or two.

During our first encounter with a Tibetan who realized we were westerners and one of us was fluent in Tibetan, we found that he could not contain himself. "Many are in jail, most for political reasons." We saw Drapchi prison, which is off the beaten path in a slum area. Guards in pairs were ever present.

We saw the Sangyip prison complex and then Gusta prison. Prisons seem to be a growth industry in Tibet. We told the Tibetan not to take chances. He said it is so important that we see these places that he didn't care and we continued on what had become a nightmare tour. We passed the main security bureau, the intelligence headquarters and then the prison bureau, each heavily guarded. All the while we heard *about monks and nuns and common men and women who were dragged away to prison and torture.* He

said, "Don't worry about me at all," and continued to tell of the torture to which prisoners were subjected.

They are routinely beaten with sticks and kicked and poked with electric sticks (cattle prods with a huge electric charge). Political prisoners are isolated from the general prison population and kept in unlighted and unheated areas with no sanitary or medical facilities and almost no food or water.

He added that the people have no rights. They cannot talk freely. Even though Tibetans view the Dalai Lama as their spiritual and political leader, they are forbidden to show their love for him. Possessing a picture of the Dalai Lama is an offense which could draw harsh and brutal punishment and imprisonment. "We (Tibetans) must have permission from the Chinese to do everything," he said. "We can do nothing on our own."

He further said, "The Chinese say we have freedom of religion but it is a lie. Despite the Chinese saying that Tibetans have freedom, there are no freedoms--not even one. Everything is controlled by the Chinese and we are repressed. We listen to Voice of America say that the West supports Tibet, yet they continue doing business with China. That doesn't help. Tibet feels left out and ignored."

"The Dalai Lama has asked America and Taiwan for help," he continued. "Please help the Dalai Lama because we are being ruined. The Chinese send Tibetan children to China for education and teach them Chinese ways. Tibet is disappearing little by little. The Tibetan language is being increasingly de-emphasized in schools and our culture is being wiped out."

All this from one man telling of his agony and the agony of his people. Yet, he ended by saying, "I am not afraid. Someday the sun will again shine in Tibet."

**Throughout, we found overwhelming support for and faith in the Dalai Lama by every single Tibetan with whom we had contact.**

### **Religious Persecution:**

We visited numerous monasteries where monks, nuns and others sought us out. Their stories amplified what we had already learned. Every monastery we visited was tightly controlled by a small group of resident Chinese overseers. Every report we heard told of a dramatic reduction in the number of monks at each monastery. Many were imprisoned for not turning their back on the Dalai Lama or even refusing to give up pictures of him. Young monks under 15 (it was possible to enter a monastery as young as

6 years of age) were turned out. Since the cultural revolution many monasteries had been largely destroyed. Rebuilding has been painfully slow.

The slightest resistance to Chinese interference was met by the harshest punishment. It was common to hear reports of monks being imprisoned, many during "reeducation" which involves turning one's back on the Dalai Lama. Imprisonment is for a long time. Imprisonment means years of brutal beatings with infrequent visitors from the outside. And when imprisonment finally ends, monks are expelled from their monastery and exiled to their home village. Many try to escape to India or Nepal. Many do not make it.

We were told on several occasions that all monks are afraid. When asked what message they would like me to take back to America, I was told to say that they are not allowed to practice their religion and that the people are suffering greatly. Their biggest hope is to be free from China. One said, "Please help us. Please help the Dalai Lama." He said if he were overheard talking to us he would immediately be put in prison for four or five years.

Other monks voiced their concern with not being free to practice their religion. Hundreds have been imprisoned simply for not removing pictures of the Dalai Lama from places of worship. Their prayers are restricted and they have few opportunities to talk away from the overseers, even in the monastery.

From monasteries all around Lhasa and the surrounding area, the message was the same. I am reluctant to be too specific in describing conversations because I do not want them traced back to a specific monk or person. To do so would be to impose a heavy sentence and punishment on someone already suffering an unbelievable burden.

At one place we met a woman at worship. When she realized we were American, she burst forth. As she talked she began sobbing. Tears poured down her face as she told us of conditions. She said, "Lhasa may be beautiful on the outside but, inside, it is ugly. We are not allowed to practice what we want to practice. Senior monks are gone and there are no replacements and they are our teachers."

Asked for a message to America, she said, "Please help us. Please help the Dalai Lama. When there is pressure from the West, things loosen up a bit before returning to as before. Please have America help us."

Every single person with whom we spoke had positive feelings toward America.

We were always given a thumbs up or a smile or a comment such as, "America is great." People would not stop talking to us, even when their safety was threatened. Sometimes we had to turn away just to keep them from being seen talking with us. Some even risked exposure by gesturing to us from roof tops to meet with them.

### **The Chinese Stranglehold:**

China's assault on the city, the countryside and the environment has been no less harsh than its assault on the people. Tibetan areas in Lhasa are being demolished and replaced with smaller and more confined structures with the remaining space given over to Chinese uses. The area at the base of the Potala Palace has been completely leveled and a new open space similar to Tiananmen Square has been created. Forests are being leveled and many have seen convoys of trucks piled with timber moving north into China.

This is not a pretty picture. The glowing reports of progress from Beijing or Shanghai where business is booming, skyscrapers are rising and industry, education and the standard of living are all soaring has a false ring when heard from the plain of Tibet.

America and the rest of the free world must do more to urge China to back off from its clear goal to plunder Tibet. The true story of Tibet is not being told. Aside from a courageous few journalists working largely on their own, the real story about Tibet is not reaching our ears. America and others must strive for more open coverage.

The U.S. government's policy seems to be based solely on economics; to open more and more markets with China and to ignore every other aspect of responsible behavior. The American people need to hear this message about Tibet. Knowing the real story, I believe the American public will decide that we need to do better and that we can do better. I hope this report is a beginning.

The clock is ticking for Tibet. If nothing is done, a country, its people, religion and culture will continue to grow fainter and fainter and could one day disappear. That would indeed be a tragedy. As one who visited a Soviet prison camp during the cold war (Perm Camp 35) and Romania before and immediately after the overthrow of the ruthless Ceausescu regime to see things first-hand, I believe conditions in Tibet are even more brutal. There are no restraints on Tibet's Chinese overseers. They are the accuser, judge, jury, prison warden and sometimes executioner rolled into one. Punishment is arbitrary, swift, vicious and totally without mercy and without recourse.